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MILTON AND THE MYSTERIES

BY ALLAN H. GILBERT

The mind of Milton was satisfied only with the most varied nourishment. However intently he gave himself to the study of the great writers of the Renaissance, and of classical and Hebrew antiquity, he did not remain ignorant of other ages. Either in his systematic studies, or in his promiscuous reading, he came into contact with almost every period of history that an Englishman of his day could reach through books. His study of mediæval times and his belief in their importance are witnessed to by his *History of Britain to the Norman Conquest*, which he intended as a storehouse of mediæval subjects for the English poets. It is, however, one thing to be interested in mediæval subjects, and another thing to treat them in the mediæval spirit. Only when a man thinks and writes in the terms of the mediæval authors can they be said to have influenced him deeply and genuinely.

Milton was undoubtedly touched, though but lightly, by the spirit of mediæval literature. In particular, Professor Robert L. Ramsay¹ has asserted that Milton's poetry was much influenced by the morality plays. I am inclined to think that Professor Ramsay has made this influence appear stronger than it was, yet he has shown that one who keeps in mind the morality plays is more likely to appreciate Milton than one who does not—and that is a great gain.

There are, so far as Professor Ramsay has discovered, no evidences that Milton made use of any particular one of the moralities. His conclusion is that their influence on the poet was indirect. And it is true that Milton's only sure connection with the mediæval drama is that he had seen a performance of one of its degenerate successors, namely one of the 'motions,' in which we note with interest that Adam was represented.²

There are, however, between *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* on the one hand, and some of the mystery plays on the other, certain similarities so marked as to deserve investigation.

¹ *Morality Themes in Milton's Poetry*, *Studies in Philology*, vol. xv, no. 2.

² *Areopagitica*, in Milton's *Works*, Pickering ed., vol. iv, pp. 418-9.

Similarities to *Paradise Lost* are found in the *Ludus Coventriæ*, Parts I and II, the *Chester Plays*, Plays I and II, and the *York Plays*, Plays IV, V, and VI.

First, in the first Chester play, is a consultation between Lucifer and his fellow demon, which may be taken as the analogue of Satan's consultations with his followers in the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. Lucifer makes the same plan as Milton attributes to Satan, namely to ruin man. He speaks thus:

And therfore I shall for his sake
Shewe mankinde greate envye;
As sone as ever he can hym make,
I shall sende hym to destroye.*

This is quite in the spirit of Satan, who has no quarrel with man, but hopes through him to strike at God. Beelzebub, his spokesman, puts it as follows:

This place may lye expos'd
The utmost border of his Kingdom, left
To their defence who hold it: here perhaps
Som advantagious act may be achiev'd
By sudden onset, either with Hell fire
To waste his whole Creation, or possess
All as our own, and drive as we were driven,
The punie habitants, or if not drive,
Seduce them to our Party, that thir God
May prove thir foe, and with repenting hand
Abolish his own works. This would surpass
Common revenge, and interrupt his joy
In our Confusion, and our Joy upraise
In his disturbance; when his darling Sons
Hurl'd headlong to partake with us, shall curse
Thir frail Originals, and faded bliss,
Faded so soon.⁴

And later Satan himself says in an address to man:

Thank him who puts me loath to this revenge
On you who wrong me not for him who wrong'd.
And should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I doe, yet public reason just,
Honour and Empire with revenge enlarg'd,

* *The Chester Plays* (edited by Thomas Wright, London, 1843), p. 17.

⁴ *Paradise Lost*, 2. 360-76.

By conquering this new World, compels me now
To do what else though damnd I should abhorre.⁵

Next, in the fourth York play, we find that Adam and Eve labor in Paradise, caring for the trees and flowers; God gives them the command:

Looke that ye bothe saue and sett,
Erbes and treys for nothyng lett,
So that ye may endower
To susteyn beast and man,
And fewl of ylke stature.
Dwell here yf that ye canne,
This shall be your endowre.⁶

Milton says much of the labors of Adam and Eve in the garden, especially in *Paradise Lost*, 9. 201 ff.

In Milton's narrative of the Temptation, Eve, as a result of her desire that Adam and herself may work more rapidly in the garden, suggests that they separate for the morning. Adam objects, but finally consents. Hence Satan finds her alone, and is able to persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit. In the second Coventry play Eve wanders off, without motive:

In this gardeyn I wyl go se,
Alle the ffloures of fayr bewte,
And tastyn the frutes of gret plente,
That be in paradyse.⁷

In the York play Satan calls Eve to him for the temptation, for he wishes to tempt her rather than her husband:

But he has made to hym a make,
And harde to her I wol me hye,
(that redy way).⁸

The Serpent in the second Chester play expresses the same purpose, explaining as follows:

For I shall teach his wife a playe,
And I maye have a wyle.
For her to deceve I hope I maye,
And through her bringe them bouth awaye;

⁵ P. L., 4. 386-92.

⁶ *York Plays* (edited by Lucy T. Smith, Oxford, 1885), 4. 24-30.

⁷ *Ludus Coventriae* (ed. James O. Halliwell, London, 1841), p. 24.

⁸ 5. 14.

For shee will doe as I her saie,
 Her hope I wil begile.
 That woman is forbydden to doe,
 For anye thinge she will thertowe;
 Therfore that tree shall shee come towne,
 And assaye which yt is.
 Dighte me I will anon tytte,
 And proffer her of that same frute, . . .
 And of the tree of Parradice
 She shall eate through my countise.
 For wemen the be full liccoris,
 That will she not forsake.*

In *Paradise Lost* also Satan hopes to meet Eve alone:

He sought them both, but wish'd his hap might find
 Eve separate, he wish'd, but not with hope
 Of what so seldom chanc'd, when to his wish,
 Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies.¹⁰

Then let me not let pass
 Occasion which now smiles, behold alone
 The Woman, opportune to all attempts,
 Her Husband, for I view far round, not nigh,
 Whose higher intellectual more I shun,
 And strength, of courage hautie, and of limb
 Heroic built, though of terrestrial mould.¹¹

We observe that Milton's Satan says nothing in direct dispraise of Eve's sex. Approaching Eve, Satan addresses her with flattery:

Fairest resemblance of thy Maker faire,
 Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine
 By gift, and thy Celestial Beautie adore
 With ravishment beheld, there best beheld
 Where universally admir'd.¹²

In the second Coventry play there is a touch of this, in Satan's address:

Heyl ffayr wyff and comely dame!¹³

In the second Chester play the Tempter argues in part as follows:

Woman, I saye, levee not this,
 For yt shall you not lose the blesse,

* P. 26.

¹⁰ P. L., 9. 421-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9. 479-85.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9. 538-42.

¹³ P. 25.

Nor noe joye that is his,
 But be as wise as he:
 God is subtilte and wise of witte,
 And wotte you well when ye eate yt,
 Then youer eyes shalbe unknitte,
 Like godes you shalbe,
 And knowe bouth good and evell alsoe.
 Therefore he warned you therfroo,
 You maye well wytte he was youer foe.
 Therefore doe after me.
 Take of this frute, and assaye:
 It is good meate, I dare laye,
 And but thou fynde yt to thy paye,
 Saye that I am false.¹⁴

Milton develops the idea that God has forbidden the fruit of the tree in jealousy of man:

The Tempter, but with shew of Zeale and Love
 To Man, and indignation at his wrong, . . .
 all impassioнд thus began. . . .
 Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
 Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
 His worshippers; he knows that in the day
 Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere,
 Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then
 Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,
 Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.¹⁵

Satan's plain assurance that he speaks the truth, found in the York as well as in the Chester play, is developed by Milton into the false proof by which the Tempter persuades Eve that he is telling her the truth about the tree. He convinces her that the fruit will raise her to godhead by declaring falsely that he, the serpent, had gained through tasting it the intellect and voice of a man.

After the sin, comes the quarrel of Adam and Eve, with mutual accusations. This Milton develops at length, giving to it the remainder of Book Nine, and a considerable part of Book Ten. In the course of this quarrel, Adam says most bitter words in condemnation of Eve and her sex, of which the following are representative:

Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best
 Befits thee with him leagu'd, thy self as false

¹⁴ Pp. 27-8.

¹⁵ P. L., 9. 665-709.

And hateful; nothing wants, but that thy shape,
 Like his, and colour Serpentine may shew
 Thy inward fraud, to warn all Creatures from thee
 Henceforth; least that too heavn'ly form, pretended
 To hellish falsehood, snare them. But for thee
 I had persisted happie, had not thy pride
 And wandring vanitie, when lest was safe,
 Rejected my forewarning, and disdain'd
 Not to be trusted, longing to be seen
 Though by the Devil himself. . . .

O why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
 With Spirits Masculine, create at last
 This noveltie on earth, this fair defect
 Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
 With Men as Angels without Feminine,
 Or find some other way to generate
 Mankind? this mischief had not then befall'n,
 And more that shall befall, innumerable
 Disturbances on Earth through Femal snares.¹⁶

Much of this is in the tone of the following from the second Chester play:

Nowe all my kinde by me is kente,
 To fleye wemens intisemente;
 Whoe trusteth them in anye intente,
 Trulye he is deceived.
 My liccorise wife hath bene my foe,
 The devilles envyne hath shente me also:
 These towne togeither well maye goe,
 The sister and the brother.
 His wrath hath donne me moch woe,
 Her glottanye hath greved me also;
 God lett never man truste you towne,
 The one more then the other.¹⁷

In the York play, which puts the quarrel after the expulsion from Eden, Adam exclaims:

Allas! what womans witte was light!
 Dat was wele sene.¹⁸

Then Eve blames Adam for allowing her to sin, and he retorts.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10. 867-96.

¹⁷ P. 32.

¹⁸ 6. 133.

Eue. Sethyn it was so me knyth it sore,
 Bot sythen that woman witteles ware,
 Mans maistrie shulde haue bene more
 agayns þe gilte.

Adam. Nay, at my speche wolde þou never spare,
 þat has vs spilte.

Eue. Iff I hadde spoken youe oughte to spill,
 Ye shulde haue taken gode tent þere tyll,
 and turnyd my þought.

Adam. Do way, woman, and neme it nought,
 For at my biddyng wolde þou not be,
 And therfore my woo wyte y thee,
 Thurgh ille counsaille þus casten ar we,
 in bittir bale.
 Nowe god late never man affir me
 triste woman tale.
 For certis me rewes fulle sare,
 That euere I shulde learne at þi lare,
 Thy counsaille has casten me in care,
 þat þou me kende.¹⁹

Something like this is found in *Paradise Lost*, where Adam blames Eve for having insisted on leaving his company the fatal morning of the Fall. They say in part, Adam being the first to speak:

Would thou hadst heark'nd to my words, & stai'd
 With me, as I besought thee, when that strange
 Desire of wandring this unhappy Morn,
 I know not whence possessed thee; we had then
 Remaind still happie, not as now, despoidl
 Of all our good, sham'd, naked, miserable.

 To whom soon mov'd with touch of blame thus Eve. . . .
 Being as I am, why didst not thou the Head
 Command me absolutely not to go,
 Going into such danger as thou saidst?
 Too facil then thou didst not much gainsay,
 Nay, didst permit, approve, and fair dismiss.
 Hadst thou bin firm and fixt in thy dissent,
 Neither had I transgress'd, nor thou with mee.

 To whom then first incenst Adam repli'd. . . .
 Thus it shall befall
 Him who to worth in Women overtrusting

¹⁹ 6. 135-54.

Lets her Will rule; restraint she will not brook,
And left to her self, if evil thence ensue,
She first his weak indulgence will accuse.²⁰

The poet comments:

Thus they in mutual accusation spent,
The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning,
And of thir vain contest appeare'd no end.²¹

The quarrel is ended by the generosity of Eve, who takes the blame for the sin on her own head:

Between us two let there be peace, both joyning,
As joyn'd in injuries, one enmitie
Against a Foe by doom express assign'd us,
That cruel Serpent . . .
both have sin'd, but thou
Against God onely, I against God and thee,
And to the place of judgement will return,
There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
The sentence from thy head remov'd may light
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
Mee mee onely just object of his ire.²²

We get perhaps a faint forecast of this in the York play, when Eve says:

Be stille Adam, and nemen it na mare,
it may not mende.
For wele I wate I haue done wrange,
And therfore euere I morne emange,
Allas! the whille I leue so lange,
dede wolde I be!²³

The similar passage in the Coventry play is even more striking:

My husband is lost because of me.
Leve spowse now thou fonde,
Now stomble we on stalk and ston,
My wyt is fro me gon,
Wrythe on to my necke bon,
With hardnesse of thin honde.²⁴

Adam replies:

Wyff, thi wytt is not wurthe a rosche,
Leve woman, turne thi thought,

²⁰ *P. L.*, 9. 1134-86.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9. 1187-9.

²² *Ibid.*, 10. 924-36.

²³ 6. 155-60.

²⁴ Pp. 31-2.

I wyl not sle fleschy of my flesche,
 ffor of my flesche thi fleshe was wrought. . . .
 No more telle thou that tale,
 ffor yf I xulde sle my wyff,
 I sclow myself withowtyn knyff,
 In helle logge to lede my lyff,
 With woo in wepyng dale.*

This colloquy reminds us of Eve's proposal, in *Paradise Lost*, that she and Adam avoid punishment for themselves and their posterity by suicide. Adam, with 'more attentive mind' reproves her:

Doubt not but God

Hath wiselier arm'd his vengeful ire then so
 To be forestall'd; much more I fear least Death
 So snacht will not exempt us from the paine
 We are by doom to pay; rather such acts
 Of contumacie will provoke the highest
 To make death in us live: Then let us seek
 Som safer resolution, which methinks
 I have in view, calling to minde with heed
 Part of our Sentence, that thy Seed shall bruise
 The Serpents head; piteous amends, unless
 Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe
Satan, who in the Serpent hath contriv'd
 Against us this deceit: to crush his head
 Would be revenge indeed; which will be lost
 By death brought on our selves, or childless days
 Resolv'd, as thou proposest; so our Foe
 Shall scape his punishment ordain'd, and wee
 Instead shall double ours upon our heads.
 No more be mention'd then of violence
 Against our selves, and wilful barrenness,
 That cuts us off from hope, and savours onely
 Rancor and pride, impatience and despite,
 Reluctance against God and his just yoke
 Laid on our Necks.**

Further, Adam suggests that they may hope for 'favor, grace, and mercie.' Yet even after the reconciliation Adam recurs to the theme of the wickedness peculiar to Eve's sex, when he remarks to the archangel Michael:

Still I see the tenor of Mans woe
 Holds on the same, from Woman to begin.***

* P. 32.

** P. L., 10. 1022-46.

*** *Ibid.*, 11. 628-9.

This suggests the folk-etymology of the Chester play:

Yea, south sayde I in prophescye,
When thou was tacken of my bodeye,
Mans woo thou woulde be witterlye,
Therfore thou was soe named.²⁹

In the play, Adam's words stand unchallenged, but Milton's angel crushes Adam's complacency with the words:

From Mans effeminate slackness it begins,
. . . who should better hold his place
By wisdome, and superiour gifts receavd.³⁰

This is typical of Milton's attitude. He believed that in general man's gifts made him properly the head of the house, but did not tolerate any vilification of woman. Adam is represented as attacking Eve when furious with anger, and as attempting to excuse himself for his own weakness and guilt by laying the blame on another. His harsh words against Eve and her sex are quite in keeping with the situation, and with human nature, but are not what the poet approved of. When in a right frame of mind, his Adam is quite different in his attitude to Eve. In an article³⁰ which was in type before I observed the similarity between the mysteries and *Paradise Lost*, I remarked on the dramatic character of Adam's angry attack on womankind. It now appears that this attack was not original with Milton, but was conventional in narratives of the Fall. In fact the poet has modified the unchallenged attack on the female sex, which probably met the grinning approval of all the men in the audiences that saw the mysteries, to something which does not make the male appear altogether to the best advantage.

After the Fall, the archangel Michael, so Milton tells us, was sent to expel Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. He was charged, however, before their expulsion to comfort them by showing them the future, and especially the work of Christ, which could be to them a comfort by establishing their faith in the final overthrow of Satan and the redemption of man. A considerable part of the angel's presentation of the future is given to Adam in

²⁹ P. 29.

³⁰ P. L., 11. 630-3.

³⁰ *Milton on the Position of Woman*, Part 2, *The Modern Language Review*, April, 1920.

the form of a vision, occupying the last five hundred lines of Book 11. The remainder, in narrative, takes up most of Book 12. In the Coventry play something of the same sort appears when the 'seraphim' with the flaming sword, who comes to drive Adam and Eve from the garden, declares:

Here in come *þe* no more;
Tyl a chylde of a mayd be born,
And upon the rode rent and torn,
To save alle that *þe* have forlorn,
þour welthe ffor to restore.³¹

In the Chester play Adam, as in *Paradise Lost*, learns this in a dream. However, this dream has no connection with the angel of the expulsion. Adam relates it to Cain and Abel, many years after leaving the garden, but represents it as having come to him when he slept during the creation of Eve. He speaks thus:

I wotte by thinges that ther I see,
That God will come from heaven hie,
To overcome the devill so slye,
And lighte into my kinde;
And my bloode that he will wyn,
That I soe loste for my synne,
A newe lawe ther shal begyne,
And soe man shall them suer. . . .
Also, I see, as I shall saye,
That God will come the laste daye
To deme mankinde in fleache vereye,
And flame of fier borninge;
The good to heaven, the evill to hell.³²

Thomas Wright, the editor of the *Chester Plays*, speaks of Adam's vision as 'one of the legends added to the text of Scripture in the superstitious ages of the church,' and gives as a parallel an 'old English version of an apocryphal life of Adam.'³³ When on his deathbed, Adam reveals to his son Seth a vision in the course of which he learned of the fate of his descendants, and of their final redemption. In this narrative, as in *Paradise Lost*, Michael is the messenger of God. Hence Milton, in allowing Adam hope for the future, is not merely giving what he thought necessary to a proper development of his narrative, but is following the tradition which

³¹ P. 31.

³² P. 36.

³³ MS. Harl., No. 1704, fol. 24, ro.

refused to see in the fall of the first man reason for discouragement without end.

The mysteries somewhat similar to *Paradise Regained* are the *Ludus Coventriæ*, Part XXII, the *Chester Plays*, Play XII, and the *York Plays*, Play XXII.

At the beginning of the Coventry play there is a council of Satan and his followers, not unlike those described in *Paradise Regained* 1. 40-113, and 2. 118-235. In the play but two of the lesser devils appear, while in the poem there is a large number, but this difference is probably caused by the difficulty of bringing a large number on the stage. The two chosen are Beelzebub and Belial. The first is not mentioned in *Paradise Regained*, though he is the most prominent of Satan's followers in *Paradise Lost*, but the second is the only fallen angel named in Milton's shorter epic, and the only one who speaks at Satan's council. In the play his advice is to tempt Jesus with 'sotyl whylys'; Milton puts in his mouth the suggestion that Satan attempt the overthrow of Jesus by female snares. Beelzebub and Belial are evidently intended in the mystery to represent Satan's full assembly of followers, for in the Prologue we read:

In the xx.^{ti} pagent alle the develys of helle,
The gadere a parlement, as ȝe xal se.²⁴

In the Chester play there is no hint of a council at the beginning, but at the end, after Satan's discomfiture, he speaks thus:

But I am nowe of good intente,
To houlde a courte full diligente,
And call my servantes, veramente,
Shortlye for to apeare.²⁵

This has a faint suggestion of his return, in *Paradise Regained*, to his 'crew that sat consulting.'²⁶

In the mysteries Satan expresses doubt concerning the identity of Jesus, and, as I have said elsewhere,²⁷ this thought is strikingly used in *Paradise Regained*. It is unexpected to us in this day that Satan should not know with whom he is to deal, and hence

²⁴ P. 10.

²⁵ P. 206.

²⁶ 4. 577.

²⁷ *The Temptation in Paradise Regained*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 15, no. 4.

the kinship of the poem and the mysteries is the more evident. The importance of this theme in the Coventry play is apparent in the Prologue :

They [the develys] have grete doute the trewth to telle,
Of Cryst Jhesu whath he xlude be.²⁸

In the body of the play Satan, in an introductory speech, represents himself as having called his 'parlement' because troubled by doubt. After his followers express their desire to help him, he proceeds :

The dowte that I have it is of Cryst i-wys;
Born he was in Bedleem, as it is seyd,
And many a man wenyth that Goddes sone he is,
Born of a woman and she a clene mayd.
And alle that evyr he prechyth, it is of hevyn blys,
He wyl lese oure lawe, I am ryght sore afrayd;
ffayn wolde I knowe who were ffadyr his,
ffor of this grett dowte I am sore dysmayd
Indeede.
If that he be Goddys childe,
And born of a mayd mylde,
Than be we rygh sore begylde,
And short xal ben oure spede.

Therefore, seres, sumwhat that $\exists e$ shewe,
In this grett dowth what is best to do;
If he be Goddys sone he wyl brede a shreve,
And werke us meche wrake, both wreche and woo.²⁹

The remainder of his speech develops the damage that Jesus, if he is the Son of God, will do them. This announcement is much like that made by Satan in the first council in *Paradise Regained*. Milton represents the Devil as having been present at the Baptism, and as having heard Jesus proclaimed the Son of God. His doubt is of the exact meaning of the term :

I saw
The Prophet do him reverence, on him rising
Out of the water, Heav'n above the Clouds
Unfold her Crystal Dores, thence on his head
A perfect Dove descend, what e're it meant,
And out of Heav'n the Sov'raign voice I heard,
This is my Son belov'd, in him am pleas'd.

²⁸ P. 10.

²⁹ Pp. 205-6.

His Mother then is mortal, but his Sire,
 He who obtains the Monarchy of Heav'n,
 And what will he not do to advance his Son?
 His first-begot we know, and sore have felt,
 When his fierce thunder drove us to the deep;
 Who this is we must learn, for man he seems
 In all his lineaments, though in his face
 The glimpses of his Fathers glory shine.
 Ye see our danger on the utmost edge
 Of hazard, which admits no long debate,
 But must with something sudden be oppos'd,
 Not force, but well couch't fraud, well woven snares.⁴⁰

The danger Satan fears is that all his power will be ‘infringed,’ and that he and his supporters will lose their being in their ‘fair Empire won of Earth and Air.’ Finally he departs to tempt Jesus with ‘all guile.’ In the mysteries which lack the council, the same doubt appears at the beginning. In the York play Satan, in soliloquy, tells of his success against mankind, and continues:

And nowe sum men spekis of a swayne,
 Howe he schall come and suffre Payne,
 And with his dede to blisse agayne
 þ[e]li schulde be bought;
 But certis þis tale is but a trayne,
 I trowe it noȝt.

For I wotte like a dele by-dene,
 Of þe mytyng þat men of mene,
 How he has in grete barett bene
 sithen he was borne;
 And suffered mekill traye and tene,
 boþe even & morne.⁴¹

In the Chester play his doubt is still more absolute:

Ther is a dossiberde I woulde dere,
 That walkes abrode wilde were,
 Whoe is his father I wotte nere,
 The south yf I shoulde saye.
 What master mon ever be this,
 That nowe into the worlde comen is,
 His mother I wotte did never amisse,
 And that nowe marvailes me.
 This can not I fynde i-wysse,

⁴⁰ *Paradise Regained*, 1. 79-97.

⁴¹ 22. 19-30.

For all my crafte and my countise,
 Yt seemes that heaven shoulde al be his,
 So stowte a sire is he.^a

After considering the virtues of Christ, somewhat as he does in his speech in *Paradise Regained*, Satan continues:

Yf he be God in mans kinde,
 My crafte then fullye fayleth.
 And more than man I wotte he is,
 Elles some thinge he did amissee,
 Save onlye hongarye he is, i-wisse,
 Elles wotte I not what hym ayles.
 And this thinge dare I southlye saye,
 Yf that he be God vereye,
 Honger shall greve hym by no waie,
 That were agynste reason.^b

After this we are prepared to interpret the first temptation—that Jesus turn stones into bread—as a test of identity:

Godes sonne and yf thou be,
 Make of these stonnes, nowe lettes see,
 Breade, through thy blessinge.^c

This appears also in the York play:

For so it schall be knowen and kidde
 If godhed be in hym hidde,
 If he will do as I hym bidde
 Whanne I come nare.
 þer was neuere dede þat euere he dide,
 þat greued hym warre.

[Approaches Jesus.]

þou witty man and wise of rede,
 If þou can ought of godhede,
 Byd nowe þat þer stones be brede.^d

In Milton the attempt to discover identity is not prominent in the first temptation; rather Satan tries to induce Jesus to distrust his Father's care. At the unsuccessful conclusion of this temptation, the Satan of Milton returns to his followers, and holds a second council. He again suggests his doubt as to the identity of Jesus:

^a P. 201.

^b P. 202.

^c P. 203.

^d 22. 49-58.

I . . .

Have found him, view'd him, tasted him, but find
 Far other labour to be undergon
 Then when I dealt with *Adam* first of Men,
 Though *Adam* by his Wives allurement fell,
 However to this Man inferior far,
 If he be Man by Mothers side at least,
 With more then humane gifts from Heavn'd adorn'd,
 Perfections absolute, Graces divine,
 And amplitude of mind to greatest Deeds.⁴⁴

From this point parallels are less exact than before, because the mysteries all follow the order of Matthew, who places the temptation of the pinnacle second, and that of the kingdoms of the earth third, while Milton follows the order of Luke, who reverses Matthew's arrangement. However, the mysteries still make much of the theme of doubtful identity. In a soliloquy, which offers various similarities to the speech from which I have just quoted besides that of its position after the first temptation, Satan voices his uncertainty as follows:

Out, alas! what is this?
 This matter fares all amisse!
 Hongarye I se well he is,
 As man shoulde kindlye be;
 But through no crafte nor no countise,
 I cane not torne his will, i-wisse,
 That neede of anye bodelye blesse
 In hym no thinge has he.
 For he maie suffer all maner anoye,
 As man shoulde well and steadfastlye,
 But ever he wyneith the victorye,
 As godheade in hym were.⁴⁵

At the end of the soliloquy he approaches Jesus with the words:

Vereye God, and if thou be,
 Now I shall full sone see;
 For I shall shape honour for thee,
 Or that thou wende awaie.⁴⁶

In the York play his desire to learn who Jesus is is yet plainer:

If he be goddis some myghty,
 witte I schall.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *P. R.*, 2. 131-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴⁶ *The Chester Plays*, pp. 203-4.

⁴⁷ 22. 95-6.

But he gains no solution of his doubts through the second temptation, so before he begins the third he remarks:

For certis I schall noȝt leue hym ȝitt,
Who is my souereyne, þis wolde I witte.⁵⁰

The Chester and Coventry plays have nothing similar in position to this, but in the Coventry play Satan exclaims at the conclusion of the last temptation:

Out, out, harrow! alas! alas!
I woundyr sore what is he this?
I cannot bryng hym to no trespass,
Nere be no synne to don amys,
He byddyth me gon abakke!
What that he is I kannot se,
Whethyr God or man, what that he be
I kannot telle in no degré:
ffor sorwe I lete a crakke.⁵¹

Satan's doubts of the identity of him whom he tempts appear in the course of the second temptation in *Paradise Regained*. After Jesus refuses the glories of the Roman Empire, Satan says 'with fear abasht':

Be not so sore offended, Son of God;
Though Sons of God both Angels are and Men,
If I to try whether in higher sort
Then these thou bear'ſt that title, have propos'd
What both from Men and Angels I receive.⁵²

And when the whole series of offers that make up the second temptation has failed, Satan says of the destined sufferings of Jesus:

A Kingdom they portend thee, but what Kingdom,
Real or Allegoric I discern not,
Nor, when, eternal sure, as without end,
Without beginning; for no date prefixt
Directs me in the Starry Rubric set.⁵³

Finally, on his return for the last temptation, he addresses Jesus thus:

Then hear, O Son of David, Virgin-born;
For Son of God to me is yet in doubt. . . .

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-4.

⁵¹ P. 211.

⁵² *P. R.*, 4. 196-200.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4. 389-93.

I thought thee worth my nearer view
 And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn
 In what degree or meaning thou art call'd
 The Son of God, which bears no single sence;
 The Son of God I also am, or was,
 And if I was, I am; relation stands;
 All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
 In some respect far higher so declar'd.
 Therefore I watch'd thy footsteps from that hour,
 And follow'd thee still on to this wast wild;
 Where by all best conjectures I collect
 Thou art to be my fatal enemy.
 Good reason then, if I before-hand seek
 To understand my Adversary, who
 And what he is. . . .

I . . . have found thee
 Proof against all temptation as a rock
 Of Adamant, and as a Center, firm
 To the utmost of meer man both wise and good,
 Not more; for Honours, Riches, Kingdoms, Glory
 Have been before contem'd, and may agen:
 Therefore to know what more thou art then man,
 Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav'n,
 Another method I must now begin.⁴⁴

So saying, he caught Jesus up, bore him to the Temple, and

There on the highest Pinacle he set
 The Son of God; and added thus in scorn: . . .
 Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,
 Cast thy self down; safely if Son of God.⁴⁵

As a result of this test, Satan, convinced that Jesus is the Only-begotten Son,

Full whence he stood to see his Victor fall. . . .
 strook with dread and anguish fell the Fiend,
 And to his crew, that sat consulting, brought
 Joyless triumphals of his hop't success,
 Ruin, and desperation, and dismay,
 Who durst so proudly tempt the Son of God.⁴⁶

The same discovery and consequent despair appear in the Chester play, where he cries out:

Out, alas! that me is woe!
 For founde I never so greate a foe. . . .

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4. 500-40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4. 449-555.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. 571-80.

Alas! my sleighe nowe am I quitte:
 Adam I founded with a fitte,
 And hym in cumberances sone I knitte. . . .
 Nowe, sone of sorowe he mone be sutte,
 And I punished in hell pitte.⁵⁷

Another likeness between *Paradise Regained* and the mysteries is that Satan commonly reasons on his failure in one temptation, and decides on another. At his council after his first failure, Milton's Satan decides:

Therefore with manlier objects we must try
 His constancy, with such as have more shew
 Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise;
 Rocks whereon greatest men have oftest wreck'd;
 Or that which only seems to satisfie
 Lawful desires of Nature, not beyond.⁵⁸

Much in the tone of this is the following soliloquy from the Chester play:

But through no crafte nor no countise,
 I cane not torne his will, i-wisse, . . .
 Some other sleighe I muste espye,
 This doscibeirde for to destroye.⁵⁹

At the end of his reflections, Satan tells Jesus: 'I shall shape honour for thee.' In the York play Satan soliloquizes thus:

Nowe sen thy fadir may þe fende
 be sotill sleighe,
 Late se yf þou allone may lende
 þer vpon heghte,
 Vpon þe pynakill parfitely.
 A! ha! nowe go we wele ther-by!
 I schall assaye in vayne-glorie
 to garre hym falle.⁶⁰

In the Coventry play he addresses Jesus thus:

ffor no grett hungryr that I kan se,
 In glotony thou wylt not synne.
 Now to the temple come forthe with me.⁶¹

At the conclusion of the splendid banquet which forms the first

⁵⁷ Pp. 205-6.

⁵⁸ P. R., 2. 225-30.

⁵⁹ P. 203-4.

⁶⁰ 22. 87-94.

⁶¹ P. 208.

part of the second temptation⁶² in *Paradise Regained*, Satan speaks in like fashion:

By hunger, that each other Creature tames,
Thou art not to be harm'd, therefore not mov'd;
Thy temperance invincible besides,
For no allurement yields to appetite,
And all thy heart is set on high designs,
High actions: but wherewith to be atchiev'd?
. . . if at great things thou wouldest arrive,
Get Riches first, get Wealth, and Treasure heap,
Not difficult, if thou hearken to me,
Riches are mine, Fortune is in my hand;
They whom I favour thrive in wealth amain,
While Virtue, Valour, Wisdom sit in want.⁶³

As has been said, the order of the last two temptations in the mysteries and in Milton's poem is not the same, yet some likeness to the transitions from the second to the last temptation of the mysteries appears in Milton's introduction to the last temptation:

I . . . have found thee
Proof against all temptation as a rock
Of Adamant, and as a Center, firm
To the utmost of meer man both wise and good,
Not more; for Honours, Riches, Kingdoms, Glory
Have been before contemn'd. . . .
Another method I must now begin.⁶⁴

A comparable passage in the Coventry play runs as follows:

Ow! in glotenye nor in veynglory it dothe ryght nott avayl
Cryst for to tempt, it profyteth me ryght nougħt;
I must now begynne to have a newe travayl,—
In covetyse to tempt hym it comyth now in my thought.⁶⁵

In the York play Satan's words are in the same strain.⁶⁶

Satan's confusion at the failure of his 'suttillie' is not peculiar to this passage, but appears elsewhere in the mysteries. In the York play he exclaims after his second unsuccessful attempt:

What! þis trauayle is in vayne,
be ought I watte!⁶⁷

⁶² *Journal of Eng. and Germ. Phil.*, l. c.

⁶³ *P. R.*, 2. 406-31.

⁶⁴ P. 209.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. 532-40.

⁶⁷ 22. 123-32.

Similarly in the Chester play he cries out:

Alas! that me is wo to daie!
This have I fayled of my praye!
Was I never rente in such araye,
Ner halfe so fowle deprived.⁸⁸

In *Paradise Regained*, at the failure, time after time, of his ‘well couch’t fraud, well woven snares,’ he is ‘malcontent,’ ‘confounded what to say,’ ‘inly rack’d,’ ‘perplexed and troubl’d,’ ‘with fear abasht,’ ‘quite at a loss,’ and ‘swoln with rage.’⁸⁹

Many of the resemblances between *Paradise Regained* and the mysteries run throughout the works, yet there is one of some importance which concerns only the first temptation. Milton has Satan urge Christ to turn the stones into bread not merely to relieve his own hunger, but for an altruistic purpose:

So shalt thou save thy self and us relieve
With Food, whereof we wretched seldom taste.⁹⁰

This also appears in the York play:

Byd nowe þat þer stones be brede,
Betwyxte vs two;
Pan may þei stande thy-selfe in stede,
and oþir moo.⁹¹

Still other parallels of Milton’s poems and the mysteries might be given, but I have thought it well to cite only those which are most striking, and which would be somewhat unlikely to occur independently to Milton and to the authors of the mysteries.

I do not intend to imply that these particular mysteries are certainly among the sources of Milton’s two poems. He could never have seen them performed, or, so far as we know, have read them. It seems probable, however, that he had some means of indirect access to them, or to other plays like them. We may imagine, for example, that in the representation of the life of Adam in the ‘motions’ which Milton saw, there occurred a quarrel between Adam and Eve after the Fall, and that from this low original the poet gained something for *Paradise Lost*. If in any way Milton was influenced by the English mediæval drama, he is more directly in the current of English literature than has com-

⁸⁸ P. 205.

⁸⁹ P. R., 2. 392; 3. 2; 4. 1, 195, 366, 499.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1. 344-5.

⁹¹ 22. 57-60.

monly been supposed, and hence is less exclusively a product of direct foreign and classical influence than we sometimes fancy he is.

On the other hand, it is possible that all that Milton seems to have taken from the mysteries he may have received, without their intervention, from other sources. For example, when Milton was at Geneva, he was much in the company of the ‘very learned professor of theology’ John Diodati, the uncle of his friend Charles Diodati. Hence it is probable that he read Diodati’s commentary on the Bible, published in England by command of Parliament in 1643. If so, he must have been interested in the comment on Matthew 4. 3, where we read:

The Devill had two ends in these temptations, the one to draw from Christ some proofes of his Deity, and of the mystery of his Incarnation, of which he had but an obscure notice; which was denied him, as miracles were to unbelievers, and prophane men. The other was to draw his humane nature to sinne.

This is a possible source for Satan’s uncertainty about the identity of Jesus in *Paradise Regained*.

But even if Milton were wholly unaffected by the mysteries themselves, his use of mediæval material of the same sort as is found in them would still make him something of a mediævalist. Even if we allow much for the possibility of similar interpretations of the same passage by two men working independently on it, there still remain considerable parts of Milton’s poems which he must have written with full consciousness that he was following long-accepted interpretations of Biblical stories. In so far as he did this, he worked, not directly with the Bible, but with the mediæval conception of it, and hence would be not a genuine Hebraist, but a Hebraist several times removed, seeing the Bible through mediæval spectacles.

Moreover, if he followed an established tradition, instead of boldly—or in ignorance—striking out for himself, he cannot be called original—if we are to apply the word only to one who owes nothing to others. His originality becomes like that of Shakespeare, whose new things are so often the old ones on which author after author has expended labor. But borrowing in which the thing taken is ‘bettered by the borrower,’ as Milton puts it, is not plagiarism, but poetic originality. Indeed, the poet’s business is not to be original, but to set forth in undying words what is and what has been.

Hence it is thought that the time most favorable for a great poet is the conclusion of an age in which the method or material he is to use has been highly developed. For example, Dante came after the troubadours had perfected their art of vernacular poetry, and after St. Thomas had wrought out his theological system. The mysteries, in their humble way, seem to have been of service in developing Biblical material for Milton. We should not forget that he was affected by such Biblical poems and plays as those of Sylvester, Quarles, Cowley, Fletcher, and Peele, as well as of various continental writers. Yet it is probable that they alone are insufficient to account for Milton's Biblical poetry. Moreover, they are less obviously touched with the spirit of the mysteries than is Milton. They seem to be the work of students, while the mysteries are in contact with the life of the people, and have in them the same breath of humanity that, in a nobler way, distinguishes Milton's poetry. Apparently we may feel, in spite of Milton's distance from the actual performances of the mysteries, that he in some way represents the summation of whatever of permanent value they had for the world. Surely no poet writing later than Milton—sometimes called a belated Elizabethan—could have produced Biblical poems quite like *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, for after his day the life of the mysteries had ceased to be a reality.

Everyone knows that one of Milton's greatest gifts to the world is his interpretation of classical and Hebrew literature. But it is too easy, in spite of Salmasius, to think of the poet as sitting 'apart' in that clear air, with little interest in mortals. We are glad to be reminded that he was also a man of all the succeeding ages, and that he gathered up much from his own nation, and from his own day and the days just before it. So if in his poems Milton has given us something related to the plays that delighted and profited thousands of Englishmen in the centuries before him, we feel that he is brought more closely into contact with the country for whose sake he wrote. We can look with more content on his failure to carry out his youthful ambition of writing on the national subject of King Arthur. And above all we feel that sympathy with the centuries immediately preceding himself, and representation of them in his poetry, bring him more directly into contact with all ages—our own among them.

The Rice Institute, Houston, Texas.